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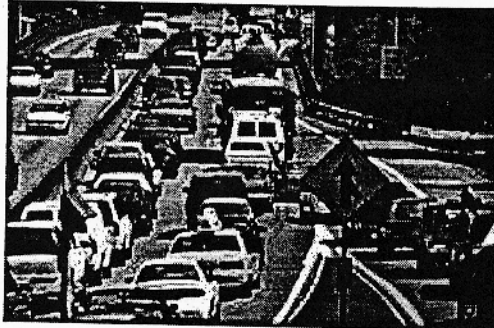
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Addicted to Autos



Transportation Now the Second-Largest Cost for Average American Family

How much of your family budget do you spend on transportation annually? A new study says it costs more than most of us think. (Elaine Thompson/AP Photo)

By Lisa Stark

abcNEWS.com

Nov. 30 — At a few minutes past 6 this morning in a suburb outside Houston, Christian Landry left his home in one of the family's three cars for his 21-mile drive to work.

"You've got to have a lot of patience to do this," he explains.

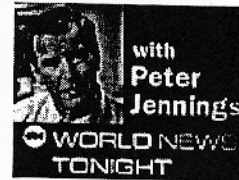
And money. In Houston, people, on average, spend more money on transportation than on housing: nearly \$9,000 a year to get where they're going.

According to "Driven to Spend," a report released today by the Surface Transportation Policy Project, a Washington-based public interest group that works for a diversified transportation system, people in many American cities spend more money on driving now than they do on housing. In fact, transportation has become the second largest source of household spending for the average American family.

"I'm not happy to know I spend more on my transportation than my mortgage," says Landry. "And I'm not sure I wanted to know."

Transportation is eating up as much as 22 percent of the family budget, with the highest costs in Houston, Atlanta, Dallas, Miami, Detroit and Minneapolis.

The new study says urban sprawl is driving up transportation costs. "Driving was once a convenient choice, because of sprawl," says Roy Kienitz of the Surface Transportation Policy Project. "Now it's an expensive necessity. People are wedded to their cars



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Surface
Transportation
Policy Project:
Driven to Spend

— it's not a choice anymore.”

Is Public Transit the Answer?

The study calls for more funding on public transit, instead of road construction. Others say both are necessary.

“In the suburbs, we didn't build the transportation system we needed,” says Frank Moretti of the Road Information Project, “and we let a lot of people move into these communities. And now we're playing catch-up.”

Seattle is trying an innovative approach: The city is paying a few dozen residents not to use their second car for six weeks. Now Alesha Morrison has parked the car, is buying groceries online and biking four miles each way to work. “We are paying insurance and depreciation costs on a car,” she says, “and maintenance costs that we really don't need.”

The city will use the experience of those Seattle residents in the pilot program in an ad campaign to convince other drivers to occasionally give up the habit.

But for commuters like Christian Landry, who travels miles between his job and home, that wouldn't be an easy option. ■

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